

Cats Who Play Rough



All kittens and young cats need to play. Play is normal behaviour that provides young animals with opportunities to develop their physical coordination and problem-solving skills. It also gives them a chance to hone their social skills with members of their own species. It's very common for kittens and young cats to engage in rough, active play because all feline play consists of mock aggression. Cats stalk, chase, pounce, swat, kick, scratch and bite each other - all in good fun. However, people often misinterpret this kind of behaviour as aggression when it's directed toward them.

Cats display two different types of play behaviour: solitary play and social play. They direct solitary play toward objects, like toys, paper bags, boxes and rolled-up paper. Social play is directed toward fellow cats, people or other animals. Unfortunately, problems can sometimes arise when feline play is directed towards people. Despite the playful intentions of a cat, he can cause injury to his human playmates. Cat scratches and bites are painful and can easily become infected.

Tips To Reduce Your Cat's Rough Play Behaviour

1. Provide a variety of toys for your cat so you can determine his preferences. In general, cats seem to enjoy batting at small toys, like balls and fake mice. They also like to stalk, chase and pounce on things that move like prey, such as toys with feathers attached to flexible rods that you can dangle and move about.
2. Frequently give your cat new objects to investigate, such as paper bags or cardboard boxes. Offer different places to jump on such as shelves or a scratching post.
3. Twice a day, spend at least ten minutes playing with your cat. During playtime, don't encourage him to bat at your fingers, hands or feet. Instead, direct the play away from you by using a long dangly toy or throwing your cat's favourite toys. Schedule play sessions to coincide with times when your cat seems most active and playful.
4. If your cat likes to grab your feet as you walk by, or hide under things and ambush your ankles or legs as you walk by, carry toys with you and toss them ahead of you to redirect his attention. Try to get him to focus on chasing the toys instead of attacking you.
5. Consider fostering another cat/kitten as a playmate. A young, playful cat/kitten like your current cat may be suitable.
6. Consistently give your cat "time-outs" when he plays too roughly. The instant he starts to bite or scratch you, end the game by leaving the room. Don't attempt to pick up your cat and put him in another room for the time-out as this could provoke more bites.

What NOT to Do

- Do not encourage your cat to play with hands, feet or any other body part. While it may be fun when you have a tiny kitten, it becomes painful and dangerous as your kitten grows up.
- Do not use toys that teach your cat to play with your hands, such as gloves with balls hanging from the fingers. If you do, your cat will be encouraged to direct his play at your hands and won't understand that it's only okay to attack your hands when you're wearing the toy gloves.
- Never run from your cat or try to block his movements with your feet. These actions can cause your cat to intensify his play or become aggressive.

Cats Who Play Rough



- Do not physically punish your cat for rough play. If you hit or slap your cat, he may perceive your actions as play and become even rougher. Alternatively, he might become fearful of your hands and respond by avoiding you or changing from play to real aggression.

Additional Tips

If your cat insists on directing his play at you despite your best efforts to encourage him to play with toys and you have already followed all the advice mentioned so far, you can interrupt his rough play behaviour by making a very loud noise such as clapping your hands loudly to startle him. As soon as he stops, throw a toy (keep a small toy such as a ping pong ball, scrunched up piece of paper or a toy mouse in your pocket) away from you to direct his play behaviour toward the toy.

It may take a bit of time and effort, but if you're consistent and patient (and everyone in the house follows this advice), you can teach your cat to direct his playful energy toward appropriate toys instead of you.